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ABSTRACT

Few studies have focused on the effects of systemic change and decentralized decision making on organizational structure and on an institution's notion of quality education. This study examined such interconnections at a community college given the pseudonym America Community College (ACC). ACC is a multi-campus metropolitan area college in a area of high crime, high unemployment, and racial tensions. More than 75% of the 55,000 full-time students each year are people of color. Major reforms in the last two decades have established a core curriculum, a computerized advising and articulation system, and a student placement assessment system. A second set of reforms tied a comprehensive faculty development program, including continuing education and tuition reimbursement, to a faculty advancement system. Using the models of strategic planning, total quality management, and systems thinking, the study traced the reform efforts over 20 years, demonstrating the cyclical spiraling of decision making at the college. Four figures illustrate the concepts. (Contains 33 references.) (SLD)

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Decision Making, Structure and Institutional Notions of Quality: A Case Study

by

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Decision Making, Structure and Institutional Notions of Quality: A Case Study

Recent debates about educational effectiveness focus on the need for systemic change, and in particular, on one of its main components--decentralized decision making. Little concrete, however, is said about the effects of systemic change and decentralized decision making on organizational structure and on an institution's notion of quality education. The objective of this study was to gain an clearer understanding of any such interconnections. To do so, it looked at the long-term change patterns at America Community College (a pseudonym for the study institution, also referred to as ACC).

America Community College

America is a multi-campus college located in a growing metropolitan area where unemployment is rampant, crime is on the rise and racial tension often disrupts everyday-living. The college serves more than 55,000 full-time students each year. More than 75% of them are people of color. Of the total student population, about 75% begin their studies at ACC with deficiencies in at least one scholastic area. Presently, 70% of the faculty are full-time employees. The college has over the last two decades engaged in two major reform thrusts. The first resulted in the establishment of a core curriculum, a computerized advisement and articulation system and an assessment system designed to place students in courses where they could build the skills they need for success in college-level work. Underlying the development of these first reforms was a belief that more direction, more assessment of each individual's skills and talents, plus more monitoring and follow-up were needed to enhance student success. In total, these reforms gave faculty and staff the guidelines and tools needed to monitor and direct the progress of students through their academic careers.

The second set of reforms (Wave-Two) builds on the first. It challenges faculty to assess (and change if needed) their actions in the classroom. Wave-Two, which began to take form in 1986, ties a comprehensive professional development program to a faculty-designed and administered advancement system. The development program includes graduate courses on classroom assessment and on teaching and learning strategies (especially those which are culturally specific), new faculty orientation and mentoring, and fully staffed resource centers on each campus. The college pays all tuition and supply costs for those who enroll in the graduate courses; and new faculty receive a stipend for participating in orientation as do mentors for fulfilling their duties. The advancement system awards continuing contract, tenure, promotion and endowed teaching chair positions, based on teaching portfolios. At three-year intervals, faculty prepare portfolios, which consist of annual performance reviews, student survey summaries and self-assessments for three years, optional peer reviews, and the responses to seven questions. These questions focus on motivation, interpersonal skills, knowledge base and knowledge base application and must be documented with specific classroom-related materials. America recently completed its seventh year of this second series of education reforms.

The Study

The study employs a series of lenses, which lie along a continuum of progressively more participative forms of decision making where each approach edges an organization closer to cultural change. Using three contemporary models--strategic planning, total quality management and systems thinking--the study traces the efforts of America Community College to reform itself over a twenty-year period. Each model allows the researcher to consider issues, which dominate the agendas of many institutions of higher education. For instance, strategic planning highlights the importance of efficient resource allocation, total quality--effectiveness and systems thinking--cultural transformation. To reflect emerging concerns in higher education, the systems model was expanded to take into account community-building and dialoguing-across-differences. Concurrently, the study follows the evolution of America's organizational structure. It then relates modifications in decision making styles and institutional configuration to the meaning the organization attaches to the concept of quality education. Finally, by playing the decision making processes used by the case study college against its evolving structure, the author speculates about the existence of a fourth model, a new century paradigm, and theorizes about the organizational path that America Community College may follow in the future.[1]

Strategic Planning: Cooperation and Coordination

Traditionally, organizations, as they develop and mature, take on various degrees of the administrative trappings we call bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1987; Ivancevich and Matteson, 1987). They do so to gain control, and colleges and universities are no different. The extent to which that control becomes centralized in an hierarchical overlay depends, in part, on the level of professional sophistication of those employed by the organization. For example, in institutions of higher learning, the professionalism reflected in faculty softens the severity of control and broadens its span. The classic hierarchical triangle that symbolizes the bureaucratically structured organization flattens out, but nonetheless still exists (Birnbaum, 1990; Quinn and others, 1988; Morgan, 1986; Weber, 1947). See figure one. Such an organization, one made up of numerous entities that function in somewhat autonomous ways, sooner or later seeks a vehicle through which it can gain cooperation among its various parts and coordination of their efforts. For many, the natural tendency is toward strategic planning.

Of the frames used, strategic planning represents the most conventional approach to institutional change. The process superimposes a logical order over the way business gets done, which moves the institution from a well-stated mission to concisely articulated goals

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[1]Qualitative methods including observations, focused and individual interviews with 150 faculty and 35 administrators and support staff, institutional documents and archival data were used to collect information over a one and one-half year period. Data gathered were systematically coded and categorized (as per Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and organized into four sequential case chapters (each using one of the conceptual lenses). All cases were prepared using guidelines set forth by both Yin (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

and objectives, to plan implementation and finally, to plan evaluation for reward and modification (Bryson, 1988; Kanter, 1989; Quinn and others, 1988; Steiner, 1978). To a certain extent, strategic planners seek to limit the impact of conflict, which derives from differences in opinion and values among institutional members, in a way that allows the organization to exist within its internal and external environments. Strategic choices address strategic problems and aid the organization in its attempts to effectively adapt to its environment, but changes remain directive in nature and linear in execution. Efficient resource allocation, in order to maximize the organization's position in its environment, provides strategic planning with its most fundamental cornerstone. Institutional leaders seek greater managerial participation but typically reserve the right to make final choices.

Quality depends greatly on the character of organizational inputs, and institutional improvement hinges on the ability to change the quality of the inputs. As a method for creating educational improvements in the face of competition, obstacles or adversity, strategic planning concentrates on bringing about changes in the learner, usually measured against performance standards. By doing so, it emphasizes the good of and the continuation of the organization and carries with it assumptions which might make major change difficult (Carlson and Awkerman, 1991).

Strategic Planning at America Community College

America Community College's first educational reforms fit this pattern. Because the college's incoming students lacked certain requisite skills, it tried to change their students or at least provide them with a safety-net that could buffer them from experiences, such as continued difficulty in one particular subject area or failed attempts to matriculate to four-year colleges, that might cause them to quit. Structurally, during the first reform period, America functioned as a multi-campus college under the auspices of a local board of trustees. Within the central office, the senior vice president for administration, the vice president for education and the associate vice president for program advancement reported directly to the president. The vice president for business affairs and the vice president for institutional advancement reported indirectly through the senior vice president. Three to five deans or directors filled each vice president's staffing needs. Each campus was headed by a vice president with his/her complement of campus deans and directors. This cadre of ten vice presidents and the president formed the executive committee.

Individual campuses had faculty senates. The faculty senates formed a college-wide faculty senate consortium, which consisted of campus faculty senate presidents and nine faculty members elected at-large. College-wide, the campus faculty senate presidents and the consortium president joined the president's executive committee to create the president's council. This council was, and still is, considered the "primary decision making body at ACC." This history of faculty participation in organization-level decision making gradually altered the organization's configuration and pushed it into TQM-like decision making patterns.

Total Quality Management: Consistency and Consensus

Like strategic planning, TQM seeks both coordination of efforts and cooperation among organizational units, but it also stresses consistency in results and strives for consensus as to the proper process to follow. As the organization's reservoir of leadership widens and its participants become more active, the caricature of its structural reality may move from a triangular to a trapezoidal configuration (Mintzberg, 1989; Quinn and others, 1988; Morgan, 1986). See figure two. Even so, TQM does not represent a radical departure from strategic planning, but instead, builds upon it. Its principles rest on an underlying philosophy of quality, which leads an organization to systematically analyze its processes for variance, make decisions based on fact, consciously define the organization's internal and external customers and actively seek input from both. Process effectiveness complements efficient resource allocation. TQM drives out fear by encouraging organization members to risk making mistakes in order to learn more about its processes and removes organizational barriers by establishing clear and open lines of communication. It educates and retrains employees, rewards excellence and thrives on teamwork and interrelationships. In other words, the organization seeks to improve the quality of what it uses, does and delivers. The ultimate goal is to make the organization more successful (Seymour, 1992; Carlson and Awkerman, 1991; Cornesky and others, 1991; Coate, 1990; Cornesky, 1990; Deming, 1982).

Colleges, serious about quality management, may, for instance, search their programs, their services and their classrooms for special variances, which are largely unrelated to a process and can be removed, and common variances, which may be inherent to a process but can be reduced; and they establish benchmarks against which continuous efforts to improve can be measured (Chaffee and Sherr, 1992; Ewell, 1993). Changes in academic programs resulting from external evaluations, the analysis of undergraduate retention and attrition, noncompletion rates, minority student and faculty access and equity (including graduation), and the academic performance of student athletes, all provide information that institutional decision makers find informative. Alumni follow-up studies and other user indicators supplement process indicators by supplying data about consumer satisfaction, changes in earning capabilities and perceptions of quality (Richardson, 1993).

Total Quality Management at America Community College

At America, Wave-Two was seen as a continuation of the first. To improve the teaching process, reforms introduced faculty to the techniques of classroom feedback and included the development of a standard student evaluation survey. In both instances, a heightened awareness of the student as customer resulted in the need to systematically gather information about what students were learning and how faculty might improve the process. "I found that there were things that I thought I got across to the students but I didn't...the next semester I did..." was a common faculty revelation. As one instructor commented, "All of us are now forced to look at every aspect of what we do." Similarly, the questions addressed by faculty as they develop their teaching portfolios set consistent standards of excellence that not only established a gauge against which faculty can measure their improvement but determine

their status in the organization. One faculty member told me, "We now have indicators, standards that establish teaching as a priority....Standards that cross all teaching disciplines." The overall effect seems to be that "faculty are thinking a little more about...whether their students are learning and how much...."

To recognize teaching excellence, the college awards endowed teaching chairs (determined by a faculty-controlled, college-wide committee). Faculty compete for the endowed chair positions, and eligibility is restricted to full professors who have been ACC for at least six years. A faculty member explained, "Most colleges that offer endowed teaching chairs award them to people from outside the institution. They come in, visit for a year, get a lot of money, and then leave. What we've done is start a program that rewards our own people for being good in the classroom." Approximately one-third of the 100 three-year positions are awarded annually. Each three-year position carries with it a $5000 yearly stipend plus $2500 expenses per year, both to be used at the faculty member's discretion.

In 1991, the college broadened wave-two reform participation by including support staff personnel as active members of the coordinating committee because it was decided that "staff play a crucial role in the teaching and learning environment and that they needed to have a way to address their issues." The ramifications of this move proved to be far reaching.

Systems Thinking: Collaboration and Community

The third lens reflects present attempts to investigate systems thinking (a basic technology of learning organizations) as a decision making model. This frame allows us to go beyond the causal perspectives of strategic planning and total quality management by adding a certain degree of intuitive judgment. As a conceptual framework, systems thinking remains the most sketchy of the three (perhaps because in practice it is seen the least). Concepts, like personal mastery, mental modeling, visioning, team learning and systems thinking, form the basis for this framework. To add clarity to the distinction between systems thinking and the first two frameworks, this model was modified to include the ideas of communities of difference and dialogue across differences as subcategories of mental modeling; the notions of connectedness and collaboration, especially in terms of defining and building internal partnerships, were incorporated into the discussion of team learning.

Under systems thinking, the learning organization gives the appearance of being somewhat redundant and unorganized; continuous loops of reciprocating feedback give flexibility to the organization as it deals with complexity (Morgan, 1986). The organization functions as a system that supports a core process. Institutionally, it becomes less hierarchical and more decentralized because of the intensified team-orientation. Experts refer to the organization as "flatter" but remain vague about the structural particulars of learning organization (Senge, 1990). The organization continually works itself out of its current job by concentrating not only on what is (the primary concern in strategic planning) and what should be (the driving force in TQM) but on what could be. Members continually examine and question who they are as an organization (their assumptions and beliefs), what they do (their

purpose) and how they do it (their process). Consequently, instead of reacting to environmental change, the learning organization generates change (Carlson and Awkerman, 1991; Senge, 1990). Interactive leadership provides a process of collaborative empowerment that reflects the diversity of the environment and recognizes that many alternatives can lead to similar ends. Leadership continually clarifies a shared vision that binds people together with a common identity and sense of destiny. Through learning its members continually re-create the organization and its future (Senge, 1990).

Quality, under this frame, assumes a very TQM-like appearance, a seeming contradiction to the model's challenge to test assumptions and beliefs. Quality is measured in terms of product and service quality, delivery reliability and customer service--all of which suggest a need to establish benchmarks as guides and to set standards by which the organization can measure progress as it attempts to eliminate (or at least minimize) some predetermined variance (Senge, 1990). An emphasis on difference, then, appears to be at direct odds with the concept of quality under this scenario.

Systems Thinking at America Community College

To reinforce the importance that the community college places on improving its teaching and learning process, it implemented a faculty-designed advancement system that compensates faculty who emphasize teaching and learning. To demonstrate competency, faculty prepare teaching portfolios, which are reviewed by faculty-dominated campus committees. All department chairs undergo extensive training in how to conduct performance reviews, and faculty evaluate the performance of the chairs in the performance review process. Such a move substantiates the college's determination to change its culture in order to ensure a long-term commitment to ACC's core--teaching and learning.

As Wave-Two progressed, employees in every work area of the college began to understand that how they performed their duties impacted America's learning environment. A senior administrator remarked, "To begin with, the prime focus was on faculty, what happened in the classroom. It's only in the latter stages that we've realized that the issues are much broader, that what happens in the classroom encompasses staff responsibilities, administrative responsibilities, how those things interact and how closely interrelated the various elements of the college are to the teaching/learning mission of the college. So we've expanded the original conception." In the end, America's concern for culture and its focus on culture change move the institution beyond political infighting to view differences of opinion as potential vehicles for change. The college's willingness to accept that differing views about the merits of the reforms (in particular about the advancement system) exist, and the institution's ability to address these differences in a constructive manner, only serve to strengthen the overall impact of the wave-two reforms on the college. Ironically, the turmoil that resulted from the changes and from their implementation appears to be an essential component of organizational dynamism at ACC.

At first glance, America today, looks very much the same. As one college official put

it, "It's bureaucratic. There is control...." But during the second generation of reforms, we see a shift toward greater employee participation in institutional decision making. Unlike the first reforms, which left the organization of the college, for the most part, unchanged, this second encounter with attempts to improve brought with it structural change. One of the structural revisions most readily attributed to the second-wave reforms occurred in the following manner. "The break for classified staff really came through the reform efforts....[After support staff were added to the coordinating committee]....it became natural to put them on the president's council." By 1992, five campus support staff council presidents had become voting members of the president's council.

The central administrative core, however, underwent an even more significant structural change. In 1991, the college eliminated the position of associate vice president for program advancement and created the office of vice president for planning and research. The person occupying this position has functioned as a "right hand man" to the president for a number of years. The position, however, refocused this individual's attention, and by doing so that of the institution, on teaching and learning. As vice president, he has sole oversight of the second-wave reforms and institutional research. In addition, he actively participates in the budgeting process. The inclusion with institutional research under one top-level district administrative position signals a shift in organizational thinking and indicates the centrality of the reforms to the college. If the term "research" refers to institutional research, then mere word association leads us to believe that America equates the second-wave reforms with "planning." In addition, the tie between this administrative position and the budgeting process suggests a serious commitment to providing the project with adequate fiscal and human resources. The importance of this position hinges not so much on its individual areas of responsibility as on their unique combination and both the institutional and fiscal support of teaching and learning that such a grouping emphasizes.

A third modification occurred at about the same time as the restructuring at the central office. On the surface, this third change involved the renaming of each campus vice president as campus president. In late 1992, a campus administrator commented, "We never had campus presidents until [two] years ago." He went on to say, "The idea is to give campus presidents more autonomy." Today, campus presidents have more say in organizing and managing the campus, and more decision-making in terms of budget and personnel. He explained, "We're easing into a little different personnel approach which will give more flexibility to the campus and the campus president....As a college, we have one central hiring office, so our flexibility will come in terms of the kinds of positions we want to have. Right now, we have formulas that tell us how many full-time faculty, how many counselors, how many librarians, how many administrators, how many clerks [and secretaries]...we can have on each campus. [The new] system [of units--a base unit with a dollar figure attached to it] will take all positions, maintenance up to dean, and assign unit values to each. Instead of saying, on this campus we are eligible for 15 administrators and that's all we can get...we will have a system where...if we want another administrator, we can have it, but we would be using...units from someplace else."

These last two changes, the creation of a new district administrative position and a simple title change, brought collegewide confusion and intensified scrutiny by faculty of the relationship between the central office and the campuses. Across all campuses I heard, "I don't understand why we have so many vice presidents and deans;" "Why five presidents;" "Why so much duplication?" Some saw little connection between the administrative structure at the central office and the reforms that were occurring in the classroom. One administrator blamed the confusion on suffering "through the throes of centralized versus decentralized...." A campus dean elaborated, "The theory is that if this is one college, it needs to have very clear, universal, personnel policies, budget procedures and so on; but if we still want to support creativity and innovation in the academic area, you need to have freedom to do that. None of the campus academic deans, for example, report to...the district academic vice president....[As academic dean] I report to the campus president." The tendency of faculty across the college to erroneously believe that campus academic deans reported to personnel in the central office typified the initial confusion that surfaced.

New Century Paradigm: Kaleidoscopic Contemplation

As organizations mature, they become entangled in ever expanding webs of detail. They compartmentalize and add hierarchical layers in a search for certainty and consistency in the face of increasing external uncertainty (Waterman, 1990). Bureaucratic structures emerge because they create rational boundaries that individuals can use to gain control over detail. In fact, without some structure (or hierarchy) complex tasks might never get completed. However, bureaucracies fragment the way their members think, and produce incomplete pictures of reality that hinder the learning process. The counter-balance to mechanistic bureaucracies is the self-organizing, learning organization. Morgan suggests that members of autonomous, self-organizing systems learn how to find what he calls "appropriate patterns of connectivity;" the prime emphasis is on being open to inquiry, self-criticism and innovation. Instead of organizational arrangements that are as clearly and precisely defined as possible, a bare minimum of critical specifics about structure exist. This arrangement provides mobility and flexibility within the system. Morgan (1986) goes on to say, "Unless an organization can change itself to accommodate the ideas it produces and values, it is likely to eventually block its own innovations."

The final model begins by accepting the basic premises that undergird the learning organization and systems thinking, particularly systems thinking modified to incorporate issues of diversity and community. A new century paradigm suggests that, while internal partnerships, structured around a core process (in the case of education, that process is learning), provide a more conducive environment for intra-organizational collaboration than do structures that are organized along functional lines, organizations still need the stability that structure brings. In an environment, saturated with dynamic (or unpredictable) complexity, organizations like colleges and universities face a structural dilemma. While the mastery of detail that complicates normal operational affairs requires bureaucratic organizational mechanisms and structures, the conquest of dynamic environmental developments demands an entrepreneurial outlook on life. The desire (and the need) is not to eliminate one structural

type in favor of the other, but to create a marriage in which institutions retain their current strengths, on the one hand, and pursue new directions on the other (Waterman, 1990; 1987; Drucker, 1973). Consequently, this paradigm proposes an organizational configuration that can support the existence of internal partnerships and at the same time address the organization's need for stability.

To a certain extent, the structure for this model resembles a series of reciprocating and reinforcing partnerships, which are sustained by both a framework of organizational procedures and policies and by social ties to a common vision and shared values (Peters, 1992; Kanter, 1989). Partnerships under this new paradigm reflect a certain interdependent independence. They exhibit the high degree of autonomy, responsibility and involvement in crucial decision making associated with entrepreneurships while remaining thoroughly integrated within an overarching institutional bureaucracy. In effect, organizational members enter into a simultaneous citizenship--at once participants in a partnership, which is focused on a particular subprocess, and in the organization as a whole (Hammer and Champy, 1993; Waterman, 1990). In colleges and universities, we can demonstrate this concept's relevance in a very rudimentary way. At the most elemental level, institutions of higher education consist of two interacting and complementary communities--scholarly and corporate. The corporate community (or administrative superstructure) exists for the community of scholars. The scholarly community exists only with the support of the corporate (Newton, 1992). In other words, the two communities enter into a partnership. This dual nature makes the institution neither a bureaucracy nor an entrepreneurship, but a combination of the two. The label, entrepreneurial-bureaucracy, reflects the structural realities of the organization.

To depict the theoretical structure of such an organization, I use the analogy of a cart wheel.[2] At the hub lies the core process--learning by way of teaching. It is surrounded by two less emphasized processes, research and service. Administrative services fulfill a role that is similar to that of a tire in that they support the processes and interact with the external environment. Less visible, but no less significant, support services add strength to the learning process in a manner that resembles a tire's inner tube. The spokes symbolize individuals and groups of individuals that tie the processes to the administrative and support services. Collaboration, through formal and informal partnerships, occurs along the spokes and across processes. See figure three.

Under the new century paradigm, an organization responds to TQM-like views of quality by "living quality." Quality is, in fact, a way of doing business. Fiscal prudence may need to be considered, but it does not necessarily rule the day. As such, quality not finances, determine the scope of the organization's mission and the focus of its direction. The notions of difference (or diversity) and dialogue across differences force individuals and organizations

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[2]The analogy is derives from Waterman's (1990) written description of the Ford Motor Company's Taurus Division.

to come to terms with the meaning of concepts like citizenship,[3] tolerance,[4] social responsibility[5] and intellectual freedom.[6] When this happens, organizations become change agents for society, and whether they fulfill this role becomes the primary determinant of quality.

New Century Thinking at America Community College

From an institutional perspective, although faculty have been involved on the president's council for years; and things of importance go to a vote of the whole faculty, what is taking place now at ACC seems somehow different. Faculty (and staff) are being asked to make decisions in which they had formerly not been involved. A central-level administrator commented, "It started when we were going through a major financial crisis [1991-92] and increased, particularly after the passage of the collegewide referendum [in September 1992, which ratified the general precepts that would underlie the new faculty advancement system]....Today, the whole college [faculty, staff and administrators] is trying to decide what to do with the referendum money [gained through a special county vote]." A campus-level administrator concurred with the notion of greater involvement, "Faculty were not exposed to budget concerns [before Wave-Two]...they are still kind of glazing over because they're not used to being so involved...."

A new faculty member on one of the larger campuses observed, "My perception in coming here was that consultation with faculty on broad issues was the norm, but now that I'm here, I get the impression that this is not the case. I get the feeling that the discussions currently going on about the referendum funds [for instance] are a new experience." The instructor continued, "It appears to me that Wave-Two is out in front of the rest of the institution and other things are just starting to develop. There's sort of a cultural lag between

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[3]Wildavsky (1987, pp. 255-260) contends that citizenship involves enhancing the capacity to make choices that take into account other people's preferences (listening to voices across differences). Citizenship demands the ability to undertake independent action (autonomy), a willingness to share (reciprocity) and the ability to test and alter our performance (learning).

[4]Burbules and Rice (1991, p. 409) talk about acknowledging our prejudices. The unstated response is tolerance.

[5]Collective social responsibility means challenging and shaping the nature of opportunities afforded in an attempt to do away with inequalities. Social welfare, in which opportunities are paternalistically handed out to deserving or needy individuals, shifts its perspective and looks at facilitation for success of a broader more diverse group of participants. Charity and generosity transform to mutual respect and concern. And, the focus is as much on how society constructs these opportunities as on access to them (Burbules, 1992).

[6]Intellectual freedom refers to the ability to pursue learning opportunities unfettered by artificially construed constraints such as prejudice based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation (Tierney, 1993).

the two." An academic dean agreed that this increased involvement in decision making is "a new trend that came with Wave-Two." By the president's own admission, the present level of employee participation is "something that has been building over the last couple of years....it's very deep." Still, distrust colors faculty and staff reactions to this chance for increased say. Faculty on one campus summed up much of the collegewide optimistic skepticism, "We're being consulted with now, but it remains to be seen if we will have any effect." Indeed, the degree of apprehension and misgiving about substantive changes in decision making patterns suggests a shift in the way America operates; and a confusion between "what we've always done in the past" and what is taking place today seems to exist.

People at ACC sense quality; they live quality but rarely define what quality at America really is. We can, however, piece together some general descriptors that help us identify quality--American style. First, on the whole, people at ACC view learning as growth and teaching as a way to equip students for joining in the experimentation that comes with growth. Second, quality cannot be separated from diversity. Hardly a conversation about the college occurs without turning to a discussion of diversity with a subsequent referral to quality. And, these two concepts in turn are tied to America's concept of learning. Third, as a consequence of its diversity, America makes conscious choices about how it operates. It has, in a city filled with strife, created a safe haven for its students. One administrator observed, "You see more mixing of the races on campuses at ACC....It seems to me like we almost see a sense of relief in people coming out of all the tension...." Fourth, America the institution is, in fact, America its people. The emphasis that the wave-two reforms places on professional development and rewards based on excellence indicates a strong belief that individual achievement and quality stimulate organizational achievement and quality. Fifth, America does not define itself based on the traditional precepts that community colleges are teaching colleges and universities do research. Instead, it describes itself more broadly as an institution of learning. The president says, "The thrust of this place is learning." And finally, America believes that the institution and its people make a difference. As a consequence, ACC seeks active membership in the community in which it resides. Whether the challenge to this outside community is economic, social or physical; America seems to respond by mixing a good dose of can-do spirit with a great deal of social consciousness.

Summing Up and the Concept of Cyclical Spiralling

America has more hierarchical structure than the new century paradigm prescribes, but the college has made a conscious choice to place its core process--learning--at the center of its decision making. No one at ACC currently speaks of internal partnerships. The term partnership refers only to the college's connection with the external community. As collaboration becomes more ingrained, the term partnership may become a part of America's internal institutional vocabulary as well. America's difficulty in conceptualizing its organizational structure may indicate that institutional members are beginning to sense a shift in organizational configuration. Over time, as the college continues to focus on learning and internal collaborative efforts, we may see more blurring of the institutional structure to conform to the needs of the process.

Likewise, it appears that America simultaneously engages in each form of decision making. It is quite likely that the college started from a strategic perspective and over time evolved from one decision making frame to the next without discarding the basic tenets of previous models. For example, the college strategically chose to apply TQM-like processes to its core activities--teaching and learning. Today, the college seems to be at a juncture, where at some levels it is incorporating the next decision making model (systems thinking) into the operational perspectives of its institutional culture and at the same time moving beyond it in others.

And, while the original impetus for the wave-two reforms focused on faculty renewal, its success required a broader focus--a systems view. The reasons behind the perceived need for change had to be shared with, and understood by, staff at all levels. Commitment from the top meant giving away power in order to gain strength. Considerable responsibility for action, along with the authority to take action, was meted out. A willingness to let the organization continually evolve, from one metamorphic state to another, afforded its members the freedom and flexibility to experiment, to make mistakes and to learn.

In effect, what we see at ACC is the acting out of a concept I term *cyclical spiralling;* and I offer the speculation that successful organizations, which must function in turbulent environments, (whether they are for-profit businesses or publicly-supported colleges and universities) enter into such an evolutionary cycle. This cycle moves them from a community-based entrepreneurial beginning where members create not only their organizations but an environment in which their organizations can flourish to a structured hierarchy for control. Theis, in turn, pushes the organization to strategic planning in a search for coordination and cooperation among organization members now separated by hierarchical structures. The addition of organizational members to the decision making process flattens the organization's hierarchical structure and subsequently brings more people into the decision making process. TQM-like activities emerge forcing organizations to integrate strategic planning with process concerns. The structure again alters as members close to organizational processes make decisions about how the organization operates. The concern for process leads the organization as a group of individuals to recognize the organization in its entirety as a system of interacting processes or partnerships. The organization that now exists, because of its size and the degree of success it has experienced, requires an umbrella structure that lends stability but at the same time does not stifle the entrepreneurial creativity and innovation (spirit) that allows the organization to continue thriving. Organizations can stop-out anywhere along the cycle and survive for extended periods of time, but those organizations that truly prosper continue to cycle upward in an ever constricting spiral. See figure four. With each cycle fewer organizations make the journey.

The problem with a hypothetical scenario like *cyclical spiralling* is that the amount of time it takes for an organization to traverse the cycle and then spiral upward hinders our ability to demonstate that the spiral does indeed exist. America Community College illustrates how one institution of higher learning advanced through the first cycle. But America may be unique because it has been exposed for some time to a more volatile

environment than many colleges and universities--an environment that most are only now beginning to enter. It seems reasonable, however, to assume that the cycle and subsequent spiral may reveal itself more readily in the for-profit business world where environmental complexity has been a way of organizational life for a number of years. As our economic and societal environments daily become more dynamic, establishing the existence of such a structural cycle could prove useful for colleges and universities as they plan for the future.

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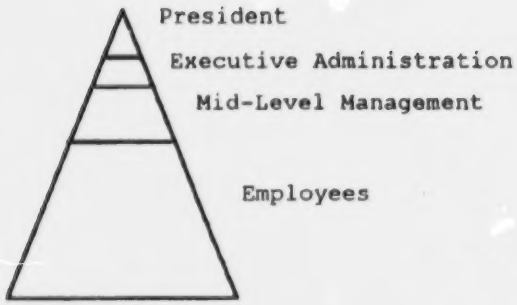
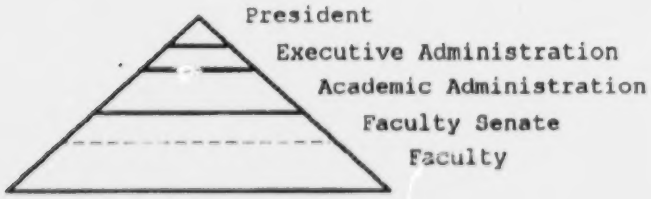
Figure One: Hierarchical Triangles



Classic Scenario



Higher Education

Figure Two: Hierarchical Trapeziod

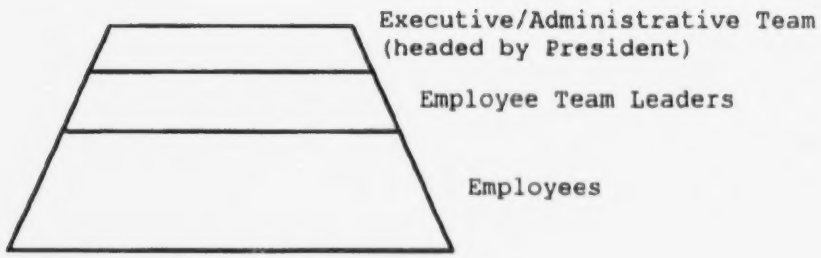


Figure Three: Entreprenuerial-Bureacracy - New Century Paradigm

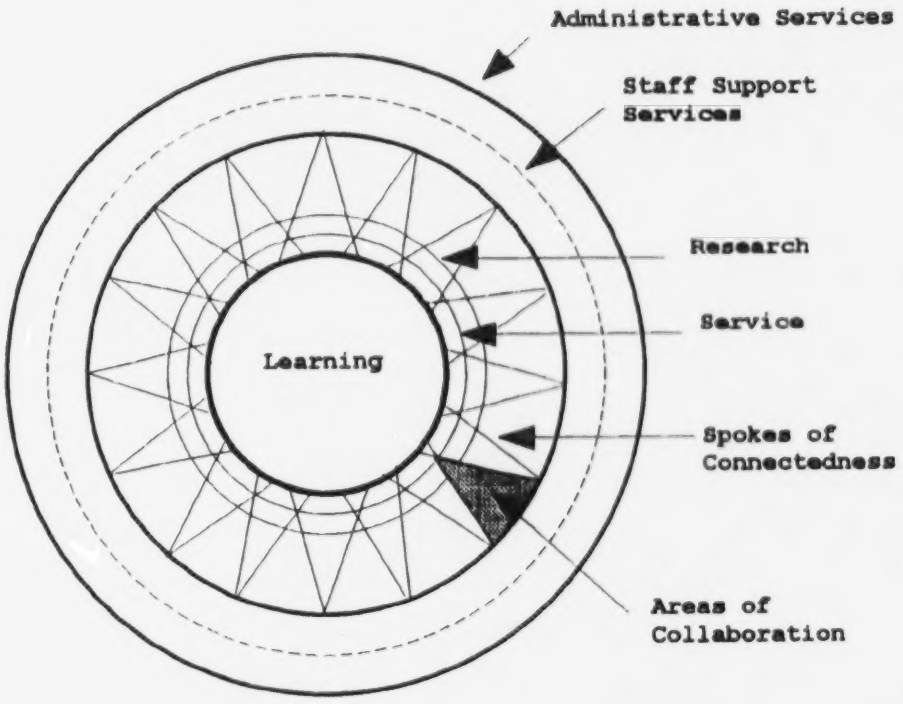


Figure Four: The Concept of Cyclical Spiraling